N.Y. Times April 18, 1967

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BRITONS CRITICIZE MANCHESTER'S BOOK

Special to The New York Times

LONDON, April 17—Britain's book critics have come down hard on William Manchester's "The Death of a President," which was published here today by Michael Joseph.

Apart from Bernard Levin in The Daily Mail and Cyril Connolly in The Sunday Times, the British critics found little to praise in the book although they agreed that Mr. Manchester had done a great deal of research.

Perhaps the harshest critic was Dame Rebecca West in The Sunday Telegraph.

"This is a regrettable book," she wrote. "This is a tale that should not have been told save in sackcloth and ashes. Yet certainly Mr. Manchester wrote this book in all innocence."

In The Observer, Malcolm Muggeridge wrote that the book demonstrated that "power has its pornography as sex has."

Alistair Cooke, in The Guardian, described Mr. Manchester's "dramatic flair" as that "of a first rate reporter undertaking a juicy bit of fiction, a James Bond movie script on an historical theme."

Mr. Connolly called the book "a grand undertaking" that was "not history, but no one will be able to write the history of this time without it."

Mr. Levin said he could not see "how, lacking only the perspective of history, it could have been more comprehensively or more fairly done."